



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

NATTIER'S PORTRAIT OF PAULINE FÉLICITÉ  
DE MAILLY, MARQUISE DE VINTIMILLE,  
AS FLORA

CONSISTENT with the rest of the contents of this issue of *The Lotus*, the frontis-piece is a noticeable example of French art—a portrait by Nattier of one of the *jeunes femmes* of the *famille de Nesle*, an influential branch of the aristocracy. The Marquise de Vintimille was one of four married sisters, and one of three of these whom the king successfully made his favorites. The fourth, when the king approached her, promptly requested her husband to take her out of the country. The family figures more or less in the anecdotes curieuses of the time.

The portrait figures in the large edition of de Nolhac's work on Nattier. He states that it was painted after the Marquise's death, but from studies made from life. He adds that it is difficult to credit that this portrait, so radiating with intense vitality, was not painted from actual sittings.

In the catalogue of the Roussel sale, the picture is admirably described. It is a three-quarter figure and the marquise is shown full face, the head lightly inclined to the right. This head has an expression that is simply delightful. The curve of the rosy cheeks leads the eye to the chin, with its delicately indicated dimple. The lips seem about to part as if to speak, but surely would say nothing that was not charming. The nostrils are mobile like the wings of a butterfly. The eyes are large and shine with a light veiled by the droop of arching eye-

brows. The smooth brow is framed in curly hair, coiffed low. Her neck is of rare purity of line. Her dress of white lawn has slipped down from the left shoulder, uncovering a youthful breast tinged with a voluptuous pink. Over the white costume with flowing sleeves, the figure, truly worthy of a goddess, has been arrayed in a blue drapery, whose folds, delightfully worked out, are held by a rope of pearls.

"The young woman is leaning on her folded right arm, and holds back with her hand the fulness of the blue drapery. She rests her right arm on her thigh in a natural manner, the hand toying with flowers she has just picked. The figure stands out from a background of sky; on the left are seen branches of a tree."

Nattier signed this portrait 1741. De Nolhac, on account of the reputation for ugliness which the Duc de Luynes and Mme. de Flavacourt have given to the marquise—strange in view of her favor with the king—hesitates to recognize her portrait in "this mysterious picture of 'Flora,' dreamy, with caressing eyes, with a melancholy grace and whose brown head is bent in revery. The white garment, partly slipped down, gives a glimpse of the white shoulders and the tender breast."

"It is true it evidently is a beauty that has been worked up," adds de Nolhac. "One perceives that in reality it may have been entirely absent, and one divines more than elsewhere the arbitrary interpretation of the artist. . . . To be the portrait of Mme. de Vintimille it must be admitted that it was painted from an earlier study, after the death of the marquise, which took place September 10, 1741. Nattier having made

other posthumous portraits, this hypothesis cannot be ignored, but how can one believe that this portrait, radiating with intense vitality, was not painted from life?"

All this seems, however, like an attempt to sacrifice a woman's beauty to the gossip of envious tongues, and for the purpose of emphasizing an artist's skill. If the Marquise de Vintimille was not a beautiful woman, why did a king, who was by no means blind, find her so?

Surely Nattier's portrait is that of an aristocratic woman of great loveliness. It is true, artists have been known to flatter and if, as de Nolhac states, the picture was posthumous, we might infer that its painter had proceeded somewhat too conscientiously upon the principle of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. But there again is the King, a good judge of beauty, it is said. Why not, then, balance his critical eye against de Nolhac's critical assumptions? Moreover, the King only had to look; whereas the critic had to write.

The King saw and, the woman he saw filling his eye with favor, what more natural than that envious tongues should be set wagging and that the defects or supposed defects of the Marquise of Nattier's exquisite portrait should have been scheduled and itemized by gossips of the court? Note that these gossips do not inveigh against the liaison. This appears to have been accepted as a matter of course. It is merely that her beauty did not justify it to which they seem to object. Under the circumstances is it not folly for the distinguished curator of the Museum at Versailles to seize upon court gossip and pit it against a portrait with which time has dealt

gently so that its colors are as fresh and its beauty as unimpaired as when it left the easel? Surely a monument, even if it be only paint on canvas, counts for something as historical evidence.

In any event there is Pauline Félicité de Mailly, Marquise de Vintimille, in Nattier's canvas. An exquisite woman she is there and an exquisite portrait is the picture. Deprive her of beauty as the envious might at court, there she sits as she appeared to one of the greatest French artists, and unless all French portraiture flatters to the point of falsehood, which I do not for a moment believe, let posterity accept this aristocratic and agreeable lady as Nattier painted her.

The portrait is the answer to all that was said against her. No painter could have created one of so fair unless she possessed much of the beauty seen in the result. Or if this being a posthumous portrait, women must die to become so beautiful, then death, for woman, is robbed of half its terror.



PORTRAIT OF LA MARQUISE  
DE VINTIMILLE, AS FLORA  
BY NATTIER